

F-Buckley William F.
Soc. 4.01.2 Saving the Queen

Saving the Queen

By William F. Buckley Jr.

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By WALTER GOODMAN

"Saving the Queen" is a first novel, a tale of counterespionage that runs fearlessly counter to the trend of trench-coat fiction since that spy came in from the cold. The author gives the back of his hero's hand to the left-liberal literary convention that damns the intelligence agencies of all nations; and America's most particularly, as unscrupulous and immoral. He adopts the aphorism: *Quod licet Jovi, non licet bovi*—"That which it is permitted for Jove to do is not necessarily permitted for a cow to do." The cow, in the early 1950's when the action takes place, is represented by Joe Stalin, Jove being represented by Joe McCarthy and functionaries of the C.I.A. The hero elucidates: "We might in secure conscience lie and steal in order to secure the escape of human beings from misery or death; Stalin had no right to lie and steal in order to bring misery and death to others. Yet, viewed without paradigmatic moral coordinates, simpletons would say, simply: *Both sides lied and cheated*—a plague on both their houses."

Despite his paradigmatic moral coordinates, this hero is no gray, aging, brooding, conscience-nagged, untidy, ill-fated operative of the sort to whom we were introduced some decades ago by Graham Greene and have encountered again shuffling along John le Carré's alleyways. Far from it. He is 25 years old and uncannily attractive. He is, we are told, over many pages, blond, blue eyed and lightly tanned; tall, trim and splendidly proportioned, in a phrase, seductively good looking, in a phrase, a

Walter Goodman worked for the C.I.A. during the period in which this book is set.

movie-star type. He is rich, and combines his father's gypsy glamour and audacity with his mother's quiet and gentle tenacity. He is gifted with a notable frankness of expression, which finds its way into formal verbal formulations. He is extraordinarily self-assured, with an indefinable cultural insouciance, and his rhythms are never disharmonious. His skills as a combat pilot in World War II made him a legend in his outfit, and come in handy here when the time arrives to tie up the plot.

The hard-sell advertisements for the remarkable qualities of Blackford Oakes—for that is his name—point to an identification of the author with his creation that is too close to be comfortable for either of them. Or perhaps it is simply that the author was concerned, justifiably as it turns out, lest his protagonist, left to his own devices, could never persuade us that he is anybody special; a case of tell if you cannot show. (Who would ever guess, without the author's assistance, that Blackford's rhythms are harmonious?) Be that as it may, our young agent's morale is excellent and his conscience is unspotted; clearly, this book was not written by a Catholic novelist.

Blackford is recruited into the C.I.A. straight out of Yale, magna cum laude, having lately read "God and Man at Yale," and to judge by these formal verbal formulations, having been unable to put it from his mind. His mentors in the Company, who bear names like Anthony Trust, Singer Callaway,

King Harman and Jonathan Hanks, also list toward the orotund in their conversation. In fact, practically everybody in this book, regardless of nationality or sex, has a weakness for elaborate periods.

Here, for example, is the Queen of England: "This is a pretty good job, I have inherited a lot of money, and a lot of junk, and a lot of perquisites, but there is something in it for everybody because of the presumptive necessity, the people having lowered their idealistic sights during the past generations, to worship something—somebody—worldly; by biological accident, I am she."

The author has evidently drunk at the same fount as his characters, and emerged tipsy on subordinate clauses, extended references, roundabout routings, political-point making, and small jokes: "Blackford simply didn't know Peregrine, could not guess what was the mysterious dislocation that had prompted him to this dizzying treachery—what an old-fashioned word, Black thought, in the cosmopolitan world of summit conferences, where the American President, the British Prime Minister, and the Soviet despot make dispositions involving hundreds of thousands of people—millions of people, actually, committing them, for the sake of temporary geopolitical comity, to any convenient fate—these men go back to receive the great acclaim, to be gartered by the Queen (Blackford thought it would be interesting to be around for one of these)."

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